

ERAC Committee Meeting December 2013 Minutes

Campus Climate – As ERAC, is there a more visible, assertive role that we can play regarding the campus climate? We know there have been emails sent from the President’s office and the Provost’s office. From the President’s email, we know there are 15-20 action items that were assigned that the leadership is taking a look at. The student senate is interested in this as well. There are different corners and pockets across Lehigh that have really tried to tackle this issue head-on. Tom Yencho thought the one missing component is ERAC. What might we want to do? What might we want to say? What role might we want to play? How aggressive do we want to be when talking about trying to build a culture of tolerance and respect? What might that entail with the ultimate possibility of putting together a resolution and putting it forth sometime within the next few weeks depending on how this conversation goes? ERAC has been relatively quiet over the past few months. Staff really hasn’t had any vehicles or venues aside from town halls or meetings that have been held across campus. It is incumbent upon us to take a closer look at how we want to talk about the campus climate as representatives of the staff. We all have a stake in this conversation and we need to be a much bigger part of it. What are our initial thoughts? Do we need to say something? Do we need to be a little more assertive and vocal when talking about this issue and if so, what does that mean?

We think we shouldn’t just jump on the bandwagon. We need to be genuine. We shouldn’t jump on this just because it’s a hot topic on campus and everyone else is jumping in. We should do it because it’s our mission to do it and because we care deeply about our campus community.

The question was asked what was meant by a “resolution.” Resolution meaning a formal document that puts forth our belief that we should strive to build a campus that is a tolerant, respectful campus. We need to figure out, once a statement of resolution is created, who it should be presented to – the President, the Provost, CEC? Are we looking to open a forum where staff can post? We shouldn’t speak on behalf of the staff since we don’t know their thoughts as of yet. What about anchoring our mission or re-anchoring it in the principles of community and equity? Those are already written and established across the campus. Should we show examples of living the policies that are already established as part of the principles of community and equity? Should we put ourselves out there as wanting to be utilized? We want to be at the table during the discussions.

Many staff feel relatively uninformed about the current climate on campus and have few details about the event that happened on campus. Staff needs to be better informed in order to make a lasting contribution. On the other hand, it seems people are reluctant to talk about it. It feels like campus tradition is to ignore whatever happens until it goes away. Some people respond and react to the incident while others jump on the bandwagon and either support or not support it and then it goes away. But it doesn’t really go away. It should be communicated in some form – emails, focus groups, etc. There hasn’t been an open discussion about it focused on the impact it has had among staff, many of whom learn more about the details of an incident when it hits the newspapers.

If we choose to take action, maybe we should frame it as “Moving forward this is what we want to achieve or this is what we want to do.”

Tyrone Russell, in a recent REACH session, talked about how even within administration, open discussion is not fostered. He took it beyond a student issue.

We need to frame it as promoting an entire campus culture of respect and that we are helping staff understand and be cognizant of it. It doesn't matter who you are talking with or, interacting with your peer, faculty member, student - maybe you said something that you didn't realize was offensive but it was to them. The students are taking action to get their message out. More staff members need to understand why they are feeling the way they do and what is relevant in today's society. If what we do is education based, it will be more controlled.

A sub-committee around campus climate will be established. The sub-committee will meet within the next two weeks and its charge will be to produce one or two ACTIONABLE items for ERAC to move forward with.

ERAC and Human Resources are often thought of as being together. This might be an opportunity to delineate what ERAC's role is versus the working relationship we have with Human Resources.

Mountaintop Experience – Is there a way that ERAC can be a little more vocal, talking as representatives of the staff? When the town halls were conducted to talk about the next steps of what's happening at Mountaintop, the main focus was on 1) research and 2) faculty and students and their partnership – the integration, collaboration, the entrepreneurial experience that exists when they work together on projects. What didn't happen in those town halls was “Is there a role that staff can play?” or “How welcome will staff feel up at Mountaintop?” As the plans are being put together for what will become of Mountaintop, is there a way for staff to become part of that conversation?

Do we want to talk to Pat Farrell, Alan Snyder or Van Dobson? Do we want to invite them in or somehow engage them? “We know you are just starting to think about what Mountaintop could become. As you have those conversations, keep staff in mind or let us be part of that conversation.” We don't know what that means but, typically, when ERAC is approached, we are approached late in the game. This is a prime opportunity to flip that and be more aggressive earlier on, or at least be a little more vocal with representing staff now in what the possibilities of Mountaintop could be, rather than later when it's too late.

Perhaps send out a survey to staff for their ideas of what should be done with Mountaintop. ERAC probably can't do that without approval and involvement of leadership. Next steps would be to sit down with Alan, Van and/or Pat to make sure that ERAC is on their radar screen – that ERAC is interested in being part of this conversation.

Strategic Planning Update – All four committees have met. Strategic plans are in progress. Let's try to have all four committees' strategic plans uploaded to the Google Drive by the next ERAC Meeting.

Liaison Meetings – Please update the Google spreadsheet as you meet with your people. If something arises that is an action item, or something that we can do or be more involved in that shouldn't wait until our next regularly scheduled meeting, please bring it to Tom's, Carla's or Brenda's attention.

From one recent liaison meeting, ERAC perception was discussed. One staff member suggested that ERAC is seen as only an entity that works on the holiday party. It doesn't represent the voice on campus. ERAC needs to re-invent, rebrand, reposition, and rename. The name ERAC – “Employee” should be replaced by staff. Make a bold statement. Define the mission, vision. **Use 2014 to listen to the campus community; understand staff concerns; be the voice for staff – this could be done using focus groups, across all departments on campus, mix new and experienced staff, utilize recent retirees, benchmark committee against other similar universities – perhaps get a research**

assistant from a one year program who could work on benchmarking as part of the subcommittee.

Misc items including Brown Bag Update and Holiday Party – Next Brown Bag is Friday, December 13. It is called Socially Speaking. Over 50 people have already registered. Lindsay Lebresco and Lauren Furrer have everything set up and ready to go. Glenn is giving all attendees a gift called “The Little Book of Texting.” It has thousands of different acronyms. The next Brown Bag will be January 9th. It will be the technology one. February and March are still open. Glenn will have the Iron Pigs applications to hand out at the Brown Bag.

The holiday party is Thursday, December 19. We are looking for four ERAC members to help run the registration table for 30 to 45 minute shifts.

Membership Vacancy (Stangl) – The Membership/Elections group has decided that the position will not be filled until the next election. Everyone was okay with this decision. There is no issue with the bylaws.

Nominations – We would like to extend the nominations to be a month instead of just two weeks. The elections would be two weeks. Each ERAC member will be required to nominate at least one person. Criteria will be established as to what we want from the people we are bringing onto the committee.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am. Janice Stoudt made the motion to adjourn the meeting and Carla Kologie seconded the motion.